

Children, Youth & Family Consortium

CYFC Monthly

CYFC Monthly — November 2016

Bruce Vento Schoolyard Garden Reflections

Judy Myers — Extension Educator, CYFC

The [Bruce Vento Elementary School](#) garden serves as a "living classroom" and upends how we've traditionally thought about school classroom spaces. Often we think of a classroom as an indoor space designed to function as an effective learning space. In a garden, nature is the co-teacher, and sometimes we initiate the "communication" while other times, nature just does what she does. We can't get the tomatoes to grow faster or slower, or stop the rain when we want to be in the garden; weeds don't listen when we tell them not to grow in the garden beds or overtake the mulch.

As the new school garden coordinator, Kirsten Saylor has an interesting job, involving integrating the garden into classroom curriculum, promoting healthy eating and access to healthy foods, and identifying collaborative opportunities to create and maintain the garden as an educational space. The [CYFC/Bruce Vento partnership](#) has accomplished a great deal over the past two years. Bruce Vento students and their teachers with help from Master Gardeners have worked to plant vegetables and flowers, spread mulch, remove overgrown bushes, and start a pollinator garden.

Kirsten's University of Minnesota appointment is funded through University of Minnesota Extension's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed). Working to define this new position at the school has necessitated meeting with many people, including schoolteachers, staff and administration, St. Paul School District personnel, parents, and various community-based and youth-based organizations in St. Paul. Since school gardens are a fairly recent phenomenon, schools have not created time within the school day or hired dedicated staff to take full advantage of all the benefits that a schoolyard garden provides.

Schoolyard gardens offer students opportunities to discover and explore nature and learn about healthy food sources. Some of Kirsten's work with students has provided them chances to explore, raise questions, and develop and test hypotheses. Once students have a chance to explore, they learn better. Brains are engaged, observation skills turned on, and their bodies are moving — Inquiry is rolled into the center of active learning.

Here's some of Kirsten's work to date:

- Partner with Bhaskar Upadyhay, Ph.D., of the University of Minnesota STEM Education Center, to integrate schoolyard garden learning into classroom curricula and meet school district educational standards.
- Maintain regular communication with Bruce Vento teachers and staff through a garden newsletter that alerts them to learning opportunities and seasonal topics related to the garden.

- Purchased grow lights that will allow students to continue growing and harvesting herbs during winter months and met with the school cafeteria supervisor about future nutrition teaching within the cafeteria space.
- Collaborated with school engineer to place the following structures in the garden: a “Little Library” to house books on gardening information for use by students, faculty, and the community; a weather station with a thermometer and rain gauge; and a log for students to monitor their garden work and observations.
- Collaborated with the school social worker to host a student Garden Club. To date, club members have planted bulbs by the Vento school sign and started lettuce seeds.
- Worked with students to design next year’s garden and with teachers to identify links to spring and fall classroom lessons.
- Discussed Minnesota’s growing seasons and helped students plant crops for spring harvest.
- Partnered with pre-K and kindergarten teachers to plant a variety of micro greens this fall, including various lettuce varieties that students can harvest and eat by winter break.
- Worked with students to “put the summer gardens to bed” this fall and helped them plant Hairy Vetch and rye grass to improve soil and break weed cycles. They learned that these plants are considered green “manure” and a cover crop during the winter months.
- Partnered with Bruce Vento’s new Family Liaison, Gretchen Ray-Jensen to build more family engagement opportunities. Gretchen has contacted [Family Values for Life](#) to discuss creating nonperishable food packets for students to take home as needed. The goal is to invite families and other community volunteers to help create these packets (the size of a plastic shopping bag). Plans are to initiate this as quickly as possible. During the next food distribution, some parents have volunteered to help with the distribution.
- Contacted "Do Good Together" about the possibility of helping provide free grab-n-go meal packages once or twice during the school year, provided the school can fund materials and supplies. These measures can help meet sizeable food demands, demonstrate caring environments, and empower parents.

Long-Term Goals

Kirsten’s goals include bringing together other school district school garden coordinators and teachers to identify opportunities that align district and school policies, identifying opportunities to develop systems that support development and utilization of gardens, and developing evaluation measures that align with experience.

Kirsten also seeks to build a community of practice to help retain the champions who can fulfill these goals,. A community practice has the potential to identify systems and policies needed to increase the odds of the school garden’s success independent of staff and community changes.

Kirsten’s ideas surpass her part-time hours and she is tireless in pursuing opportunities to create school/community gardens that meet multiple educational, nutritional, and food availability goals for schools and communities. Stay tuned for updates as the partnership with Bruce Vento and U of M Extension continues to deepen.

Consortium News

Cultural Providers Network Storytelling Project Launched

Members of the Cultural Providers Network (CPN) have created a storytelling project to document their work and CPN's influence on individuals' professional practices and larger communities of practice. Learn more about the [CPN Storytelling Project](#) on the CYFC YouTube channel.

Learn more about the [Cultural Providers Network](#), a coalition of health providers for children and families of color, institutions of higher learning, and Minnesota policy professionals. Current membership includes professionals from approximately 20 agencies. All are welcome!

Lessons from the Field Registration Is Now Open!

Beginning in January 2017, CYFC will host regional Lessons from the Field seminars on the topic of transgender youth, featuring CYFC's resident visiting scholar [Jenifer McGuire, Ph.D.](#)

Lessons from the Field discussions are intended for parents, educators, and professionals who work with families and youth. Topics include:

- Challenges that face rural and urban transgender youth and families.
- Definitions and vocabulary around transgender youth, including how terms show up in everyday interactions.
- Standards of practice for professionals who work with transgender youth.
- Stages of development for transgender youth, as well as how the medical system and mental health community care for them.
- How communities can support families and families can support their transgender children.
- Nutrition and body image for transitioning youth.
- Mental health as a public health issue.

Registration is required but attendance is free and open to the public. Lunch will be provided for those attending the full day. Continuing education units are available for social workers. [Find more information and register on the CYFC website.](#)

University & Community Conferences, Training, and Resources

Online Course to Address Research and Theories of the Positive Youth Development Approach

Sponsor: University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development

Date: January 30 to February 27, 2017

Cost: \$100

Location: Online

Interact and learn from other youth development professionals in this online course covering the field of youth development. Ways to support youth needs and the role of youth workers will be addressed. You'll also learn how to integrate positive youth development principles into your practice and how these principles affect how you work with young people. Learn more and register on the [Center for Youth Development website.](#)

Presentation to Focus on Health of Pregnant Incarcerated Women

Sponsor: University of Minnesota Center for Leadership Education in Maternal & Child Public Health

Date: December 7, 2016

Cost: Free

Location: Minneapolis, MN

[Rebecca Shlafer, Ph.D., M.P.H.](#), will present her research with the [Minnesota Prison Doula Project](#), which provides pregnancy and parenting support for incarcerated women. She will also discuss how her research was used to influence legislative change in Minnesota. Learn more about Rebecca's work by visiting the [Unbarred: Strengthening Families Affected by Incarceration page](#) on the CYFC website, and then RSVP on the [Powell Center for Women's Health](#) website.

Conference to Highlight Strategies to Engage Families and Communities for Racial Equity

Sponsor: Minnesota Council on Family Relations

Date: December 2, 2016

Cost: \$70-\$140

Location: New Brighton, MN

This conference, "Strategies for Social, Economic, and Educational Change: Engaging Families and Communities for Racial Equity," brings together public health and other professionals to examine the impacts of racial injustice. Attendees also will learn about strategies to address, uproot, support, and help heal people and families affected by racial injustice, trauma, and adversity. Artika Tyner, Ph.D., associate vice president of diversity and inclusion at the University of St. Thomas, as well as an author and speaker, will present the keynote address, "Strategies for Authentic Engagements and Community Development, Criminal Justice, and Education." Learn more and register on the [Minnesota Council on Family Relations website](#).

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